

ORDERS FOR THURSDAY, JUNE 20, 2002

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 9:30 a.m., Thursday, June 20; that following the prayer and pledge the Journal of Proceedings be approved to date, the morning hour be deemed expired, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and there be a period of morning business until 10:30 a.m. with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the first half under the control of the majority leader or his designee, and the second half under the control of the Republican leader or his designee, with the first 15 minutes of time under the control of Senator SPECTER; that at 10:30 a.m. the Senate resume consideration of the Department of Defense authorization bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in adjournment following the remarks of Senator MCCAIN of Arizona.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCURRENT RECEIPT

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I speak on behalf of the pending amendment. I strongly support it and would like to finally see this issue brought to a successful conclusion after many years.

I first introduced legislation on concurrent receipt back in 1992, again in 1993, again in 1995, and again in 1999. In 1999, I introduced legislation that became law as a compromise measure that paid special compensation pay for severely disabled military retirees with disabilities greater than 50 percent.

Here we are in 2002 with an opportunity to finally rectify a problem that has plagued our veterans, and to rec-

tify it once and for all for all military retirees who have become disabled during their military service.

We have an opportunity to show a measure of our gratitude to these brave men and women who are serving our Nation as we speak in a time of war that all of us agree may be of very long duration.

The existing law, as it stands, is simply discriminatory and wrong. Concurrent receipt is at its core a fairness issue. Present law simply discriminates against career military people who have been injured or disabled in the conduct of their duties while in defense of this Nation.

I want to emphasize the important aspect of this issue to all of my colleagues.

Retired veterans are the only group of Federal retirees who are required to waive their retirement pay in order to receive VA disability compensation. I want to repeat that. This record must reflect the importance of this legislation to correct a gross and unfair discrimination against our veterans. Retired veterans are the only group of Federal retirees who are required to waive their retirement pay in order to receive VA disability compensation.

In my view, the two pays are for very different purposes: one for service to the country and the other for physical or mental pain and suffering which occurred in that service to the country.

When I first drafted concurrent receipt legislation as ranking member of the Personnel Subcommittee, it was cosponsored by my dear friend, and former chairman of the Personnel Subcommittee, Senator John Glenn, in 1992. If he were here today, he would speak as passionately as he did during those years in favor of this legislation.

The Retired Pay Restoration Act has received strong bipartisan support in Congress with 396 cosponsors in the House and 82 cosponsors in the Senate.

The Military Coalition, an organization of 33 prominent veterans' and retirees' advocacy groups, supports this legislation, as do many other veterans service organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, and Disabled American Veterans.

For the brave men and women who have selected to make their career the U.S. military, they face an unknown risk. If they are injured, they will be forced to forego their earned retired pay in order to receive their VA disability compensation. In effect, they will be paying for their own disability benefits from their retirement checks.

We have a unique opportunity this year to redress the unfair practice of requiring disabled military retirees to fund their own disability compensation. Sixty percent is not enough. We need full funding for all military retirees. It is time for us to show our appreciation to the men and women who have suffered so much for our great Nation.

If we went back and looked at the legislative history of the legislation we passed in 1999, I think a review of the debate and discussion of that legislation would show that we wanted to cover all veterans, but there simply was not enough money. So we drew the line at severely disabled military retirees with disabilities greater than 50 percent, with the full intention of expanding that to all veterans.

Why did we select 50 percent? It was an arbitrary selection because we knew that over time we would expand it. The reason why we drew the line where we did was simply for budgetary reasons.

Again, it seems to me, the argument against it is only one; that is, we cannot afford it because it is too large a hit to the budget.

I would argue that perhaps we have our priorities a bit skewed if we are not going to take care of our veterans as our first priority. So I hope we can convince the administration of the justice and fairness behind this proposal. I hope we can get it resolved to the benefit of our men and women who have served.

I point out that this is an issue not only for veterans who have retired and feel inequity, but the active duty members of our military are also aware of this situation.

So I speak strongly on behalf of the amendment, as one who has been involved in it, as I said, for nearly 10 years. We have achieved partial success now. I hope we can achieve complete success and make all veterans eligible for this program and they not have to give up their retirement pay in order to receive VA disability compensation.

I thank the Presiding Officer for his patience, and I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 9:30 A.M.
TOMORROW

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands adjourned until 9:30 a.m. tomorrow.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 5:59 p.m., adjourned until Thursday, June 20, 2002, at 9:30 a.m.